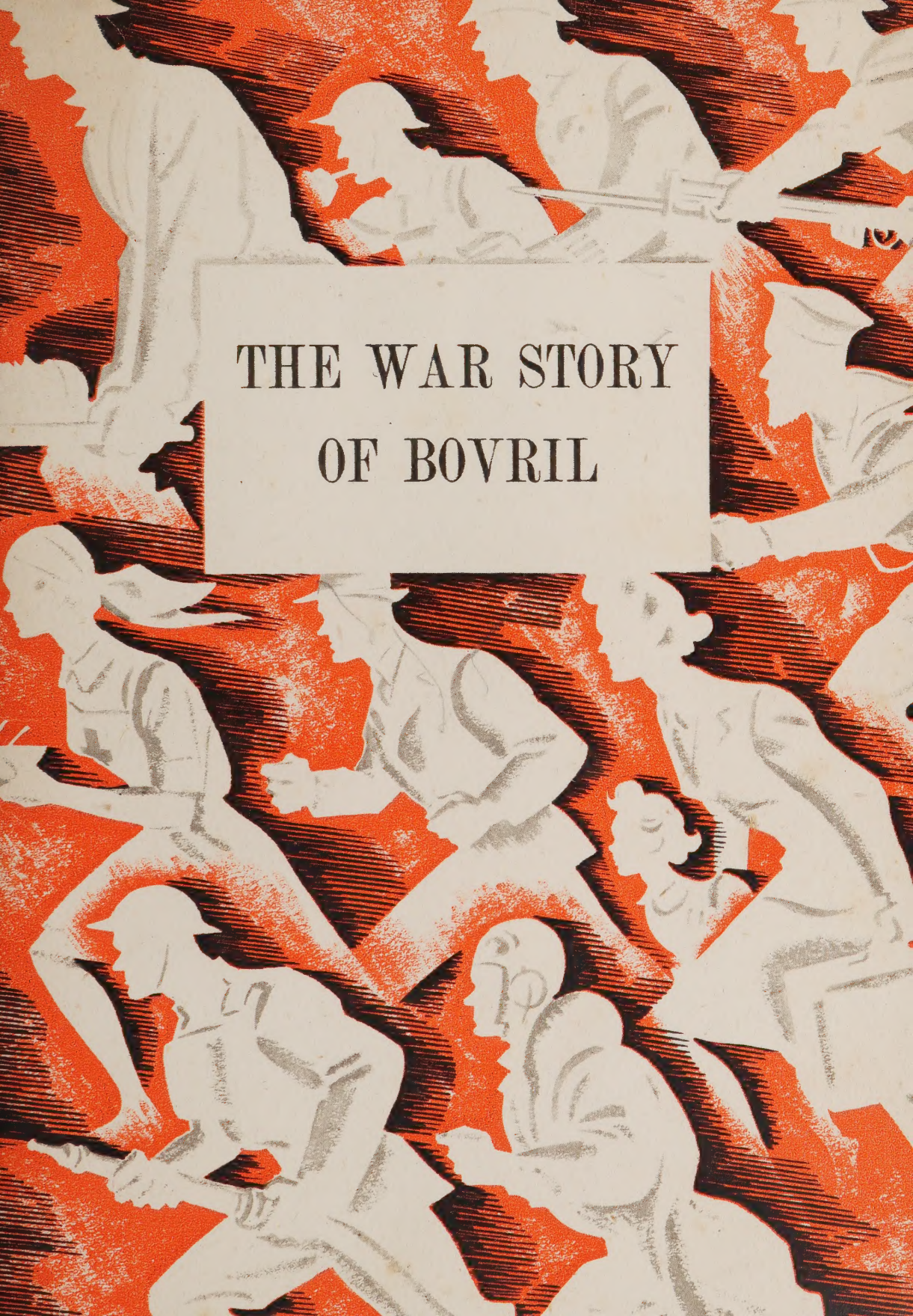
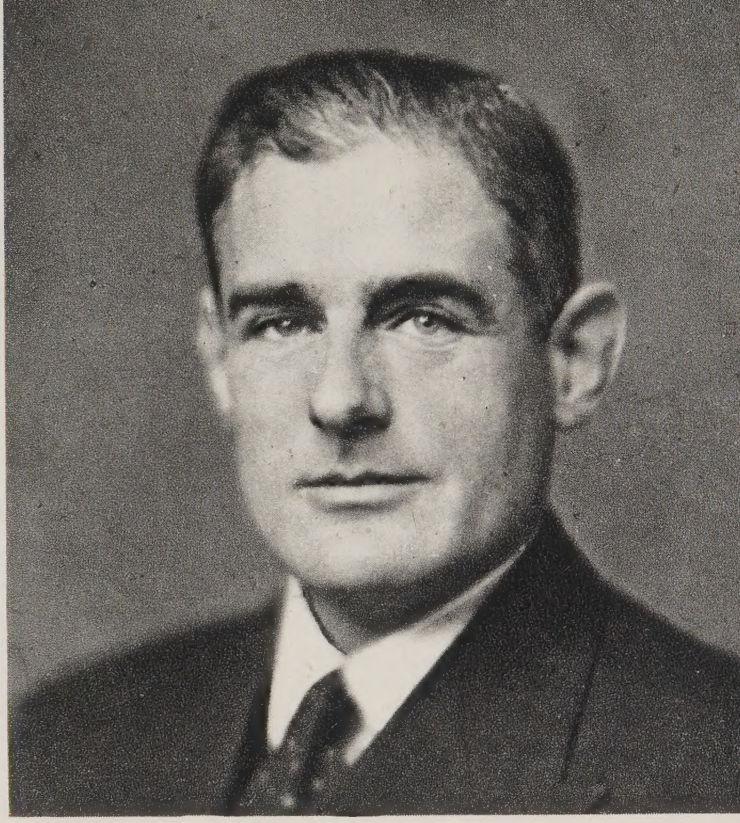

THE WAR STORY
OF BOVRIL

22500845707

A Personal Message from Lord Luke



I think many of our customers, at home and abroad, will be interested to hear something of the experiences of Bovril Ltd., during the years 1939 to 1945.

The story is told, mainly in pictures, in the following pages. It is interesting, I think, not because our own difficulties and vicissitudes were unusual, but rather because they were typical of the conditions under which British industries had to work during the war years.

Hundreds of factories like ours were bombed. Thousands of organisations were compelled to disperse their personnel and make shift with short staffs and improvised materials. Millions of ordinary work-people lived and laboured as ours did, under the continual menace of aerial bombardment.

Multiply our story a thousandfold and you catch a glimpse of the spirit that carried our nation to victory.

OLD STREET, LONDON, E.C.1.
1946

Luke

AUTUMN 1938

When Mr. Chamberlain came back from Berchtesgaden with an umbrella in one hand and a promise of " Peace in our Time " in the other, the people heaved a sigh of relief and went about their business with minds at ease. But Whitehall began with feverish haste to prepare for war.

Shortly after Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia, the directors of Bovril made what proved to be a momentous decision. They realised that the peril of war was imminent. They knew that if hostilities did begin, the maintenance of the nation's food supplies would become of paramount importance. They expected that Britain's industrial centres would be subjected to intense aerial bombardment. Their own factory, already working on Government orders, was situated in the most vulnerable place of all—in the very heart of London.

With a full sense of the gravity of the issue, the directors decided to prepare for the worst. They began to make plans for the erection and equipment of an emergency factory that would be capable of maintaining an uninterrupted output of all the food supplies that Bovril Ltd. would be required to produce for the nation in the event of war. In due course, this factory was built at Ampthill in Bedfordshire.

Elsewhere in this booklet some of the special war

Refreshment for Evacuees

products of the Bovril factories are described. Many of them were made in astronomical quantities, but their variety alone is impressive evidence of the importance of Bovril's contribution to the war effort. It is not difficult to imagine how disastrous the consequences might have been if the company had not decided to go ahead with its plans for the factory at Ampthill.

WAR DECLARED

Events justified the venture. During the early months of 1939 Government orders for emergency foodstuffs steadily increased and became ominously urgent. Some

Old Street suffered Great Damage

150 workers were actually on duty on the morning of Sunday, September 3rd, when, like a fanfare from hell, the first sinister wail of air-raid sirens followed the Prime Minister's broadcast announcement that war had been declared. It gave our staff its first opportunity to use the factory "Alert" and "Shelter" arrangements.

"I think we've just time for a hot Bovril"

These arrangements proved very effective when the testing time came. The Old Street factory, built over 50 years ago, is very solid in structure, having walls of unusual thickness. When

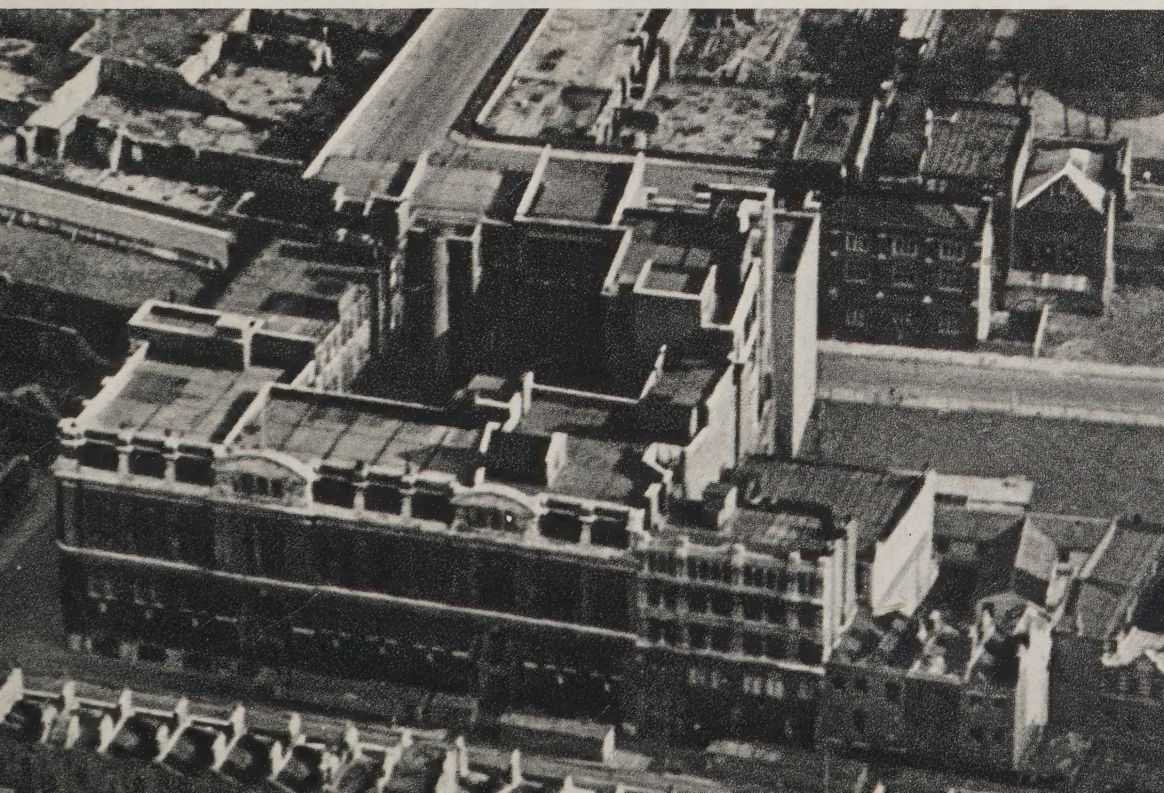
air-raid precautions became necessary, the basements, already of great strength, were reinforced, provided with air-filtration plant, independent electric light generators and other equipment for both safety and comfort. They made excellent air-raid shelters for the whole of our staff.

AIR-RAIDS

Our Old Street factory received its first war damage during the big raid on London in the Autumn of 1940. We suffered grave material losses. A vast consignment of goods packed ready for dispatch was completely destroyed. Almost every window in the building was shattered and great quantities of food, packing material, equipment and machinery were damaged.

Nobody who saw the factory after that raid will forget the scene of indescribable confusion inside, or the appalling devastation around. In every direction, whole blocks of

Aerial View of Old Street



buildings had been razed to the ground. Ours stood like an island in a frozen sea of crumbled brick and shattered stone.

The Old Street factory suffered great damage for the second time during a raid in November, 1941, when a destructive fire broke out, and we lost, among other things, nearly a hundred thousand corrugated cardboard packing cases.

Our buildings and their contents would have suffered more severely in both these raids but for the Crittall Steel Doors which, when closed, made each department fireproof and waterproof. We owe a lot to these doors. During the flying-bomb period, when there was insufficient time between alerts for the staff to reach the basement shelters, they protected our personnel on many occasions from the effect of blast and flying glass.

Through every form of enemy action against London—day-raids, night-raids, fire-raids, flying-bomb and rocket attacks, the morale of our workpeople was beyond praise. They caused us anxiety only by their reluctance to leave their work when warnings were sounded, often "carrying on" defiantly when danger was imminent.

DON'T WASTE FUEL

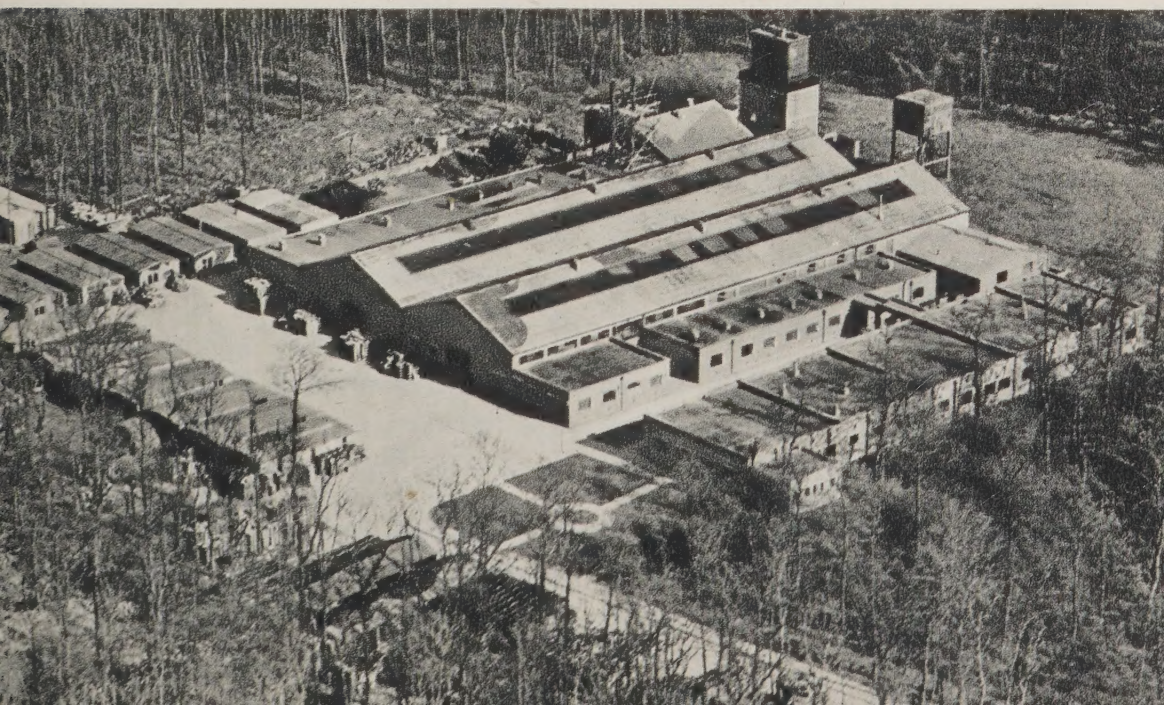
Keep warm on Bovril

WAR ORGANISATION

Although the "Shadow Factory" at Ampthill was not yet quite finished, the damage done at Old Street by the 1940 air-raid compelled us to bring it into use immediately. An emergency staff was sent there at once, and by the end of the year we had the place in full production. From first to last no air-raid damage was suffered at Ampthill. The factory was well camouflaged and merged effectively into the surrounding landscape. At this time, too, we moved our Sales Organisation and Registered Offices to Bedford.

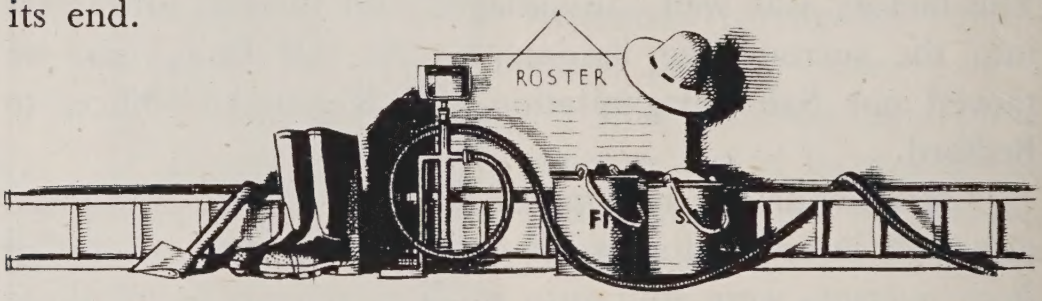
Meanwhile our raw materials and packages had to be dispersed in small dumps all over the country. Supplies from overseas were split into small shipments to minimise loss from submarine warfare. By this time we were in the full tide of war production for the various Services and Ministries. We were making $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as much Bovril as before the war, and in addition were turning out great

The Ampthill Factory was well camouflaged



quantities of special foods like milk, tea and sugar tablets for the Forces' emergency ration packs, and a special form of " Pemmican " that we devised and manufactured for use in lifeboats.

Perhaps the best evidence of the success of these measures is the fact that in spite of the raiding and the damage done to our premises at Old Street, we lost only four days' production from the beginning of the war to its end.



AIR RAID INCIDENTS AT OLD STREET

SEPTEMBER, 1940.—Two 500-lb. bombs fell in Bunhill Row, 25 feet away from the east side of the building, which was heavily damaged by blast and fire. The factory was closed for two days.

DECEMBER, 1940.—The north and east sides of the building were damaged by blast during the worst incendiary raid of the war, when Bunhill Row was almost completely destroyed, with a large area southwards as far as Fore Street. No stoppage of production.

MAY, 1941.—A 1,000-lb. bomb exploded 30 feet south of the building, causing extensive fire and blast damage. The factory Fire Guards and Home Guard Unit did very good work controlling the spread of fire until relieved by the N.F.S. The factory was closed for one day.

JULY, 1944.—Extensive blast damage to south and west sides of the building by a flying bomb which fell 120 yards away. The factory was closed for one day.

UNEXPLODED BOMB.—For a considerable time a 500-lb. unexploded bomb remained underground less than 30 feet from the north-east corner of the building. Another unexploded bomb—a thousand-pounder—fell about 40 feet from the front. Both bombs were at length removed by a Bomb Disposal Squad.

FLYING BOMBS.—In the worst period of air attack by flying bombs, 27 warnings of " Immediate Danger " were received during the working hours of one day

Packing Emergency Rations

BOVRIL IN WAR

BOVRIL HAS THE POWER of assisting the body to assimilate other foods. By doing so, it stimulates the digestive organs and helps to build up warmth and resistance. It is highly concentrated and very simple to prepare. The value of Bovril in time of war has been proved many times. Indeed, it owes its origin to the Franco-Prussian War, when the French Government wanted to provision its fortresses with meat preserved in tins. J. Lawson Johnston, the dietetic pioneer whom they consulted, went further and evolved from the concentrated juices of beef a product which he called "*Johnston's Fluid Beef.*" This food was later named "Bovril."

HOT BOVRIL CHEERS!

From the beginning of hostilities, our resources were taxed to the utmost to meet all the demands for our product. Priority had to be given, of course, to military, naval and air force requirements and to hospitals. Then, with the coming of air-raids, the Civil Defence Services became importunate, and the general public demanded more and more Bovril. It helped to keep out the cold when they had to go into air-raid shelters. It comforted those on duty. It sustained the aged and infirm. When food became scarce and lacking in variety, housewives everywhere turned to Bovril gratefully because they found that it imparted richness and flavour to otherwise dull and monotonous meals.

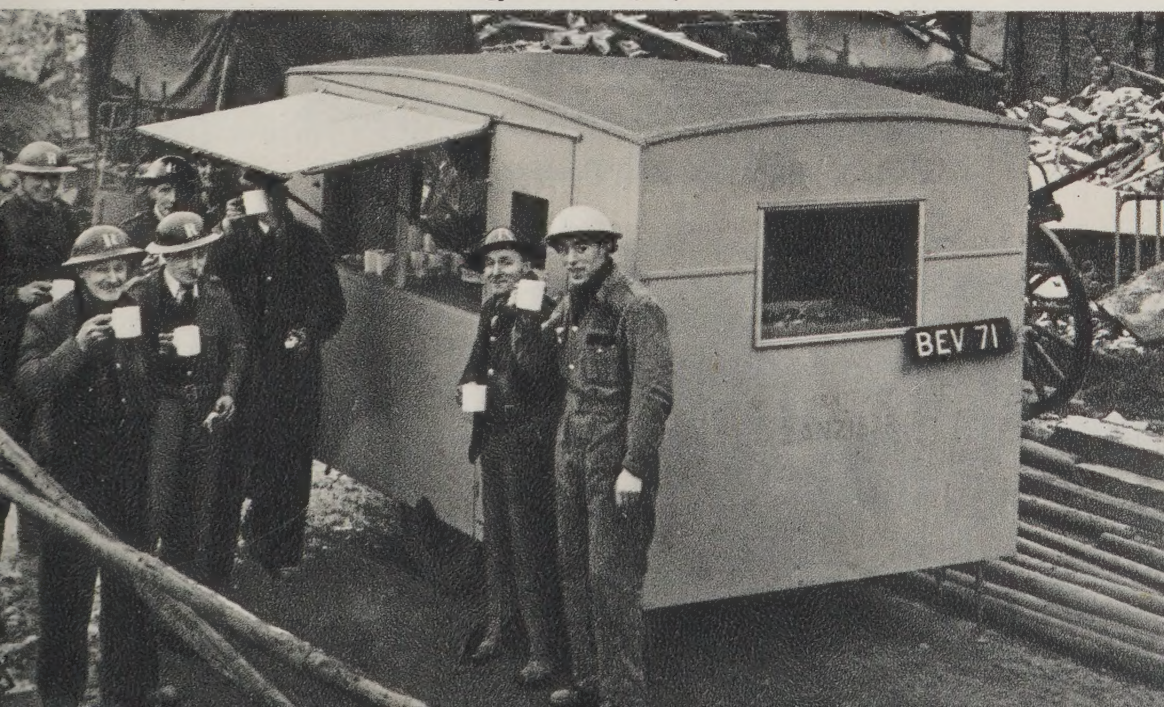
In these circumstances, the problem of maintaining the supply of Bovril became more acute as time went on. One of our major difficulties was occasioned by the fact that, fearing lest shortage should occur, many of the public took to buying Bovril in large quantities for storage, and so the sale of 16-oz. bottles became disproportionately high. We felt that this practice should, in the national interest, be discouraged. We therefore introduced a "quota" system to ensure equitable distribution. While maintaining our pre-war prices, we withdrew the 16-oz. packs from public sale, earmarking them for N.A.A.F.I. and the Services, and then took care that the smaller bottles were supplied to all parts of the country in quantities carefully related to population-density and war conditions. This quota system has proved very satisfactory. It is still in force, and will be continued until supply and demand are again equalised.

WAR EXPORTS

On the outbreak of war, the export of Bovril was permitted only under licence. In 1941, all overseas markets were cut off except a few of the Crown Colonies. Thereafter we exported Bovril only to meet the requirements of the armed forces of the United Nations. Great quantities of Bovril in bottles were shipped from England to all theatres of war in the European command, while the Bovril factory in Canada supplied the forces in other war areas. Our Canadian associates were allowed also to ship limited quantities of Bovril for civilian consumption and they were able to keep some of our overseas markets supplied on our behalf, in particular, South Africa and the British West Indies.

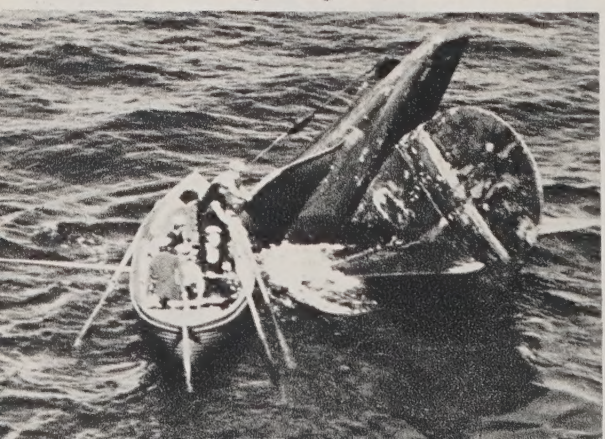
One of our most interesting war-time exports was "Bovril Pemmican." This name was originally given to a form of preserved meat used by the North American Indians. They prepared it by cutting the lean of buffalo

Energy in Emergency



Some War-time Products of Bovril Ltd.

Ships' Lifeboats and Airmen's Dinghies carried Bovril Pemmican



meat into thin slices, drying it in the sun, then pounding and squeezing it into cakes.

Later, an improved form of Pemmican was produced by the naval victualling yards for the Arctic explorations of Shackleton and others. Dried lean beef was mixed with its own weight of pure melted beef fat or with dried fruits, pressed and packed in airtight bags. It could be kept in storage for long periods without deterioration and had a very high nutritive value.

At the outbreak of war, the Ministry of War Transport asked Bovril Ltd., to co-operate in the development of a more modern form of Pemmican to be carried for use in lifeboats by all ships sailing under the Allied flag. Packed in the special containers illustrated on left, Bovril Pemmican was made a standard component of all "Lifeboat Rations," and several millions of tins were exported in bulk to provision the lifeboats and rafts of ships based on overseas ports.

Bovril Pemmican has been used for many purposes during the war. It formed part of the food-pack fitted to airmen's dinghies. It has been prescribed by several hospital dieticians for post-operational cases where feeding difficulties have resulted in loss of weight.

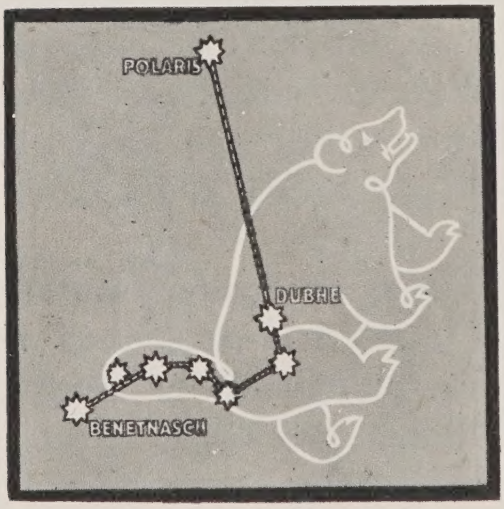
HOT BOVRIL CHEERS!

BOVRIL ADVERTISING IN WAR

ADDRESSING OUR SHAREHOLDERS in 1940, the late Lord Luke, then our Chairman, remarked that, "as usual, we had evidence that the influence of Bovril advertising was as far-flung as the Empire," and he quoted a magazine article on Jamaica in which the writer said, "I have heard of a Jamaican boy who was called 'Bovril.'

STAR LOCATION

(This chart is reproduced by permission of the Air Ministry)



How to find the Pole Star

The Pole Star (Polaris) is the "policeman" of the sky; you can rely on it for directions. To locate it, look first for the familiar plough, which forms part of the Great Bear, and then for the two stars which act as pointers. The Pole Star, which is due North, always helps you to find your way—and Bovril always helps you to keep warm!

Thank your stars for HOT BOVRIL

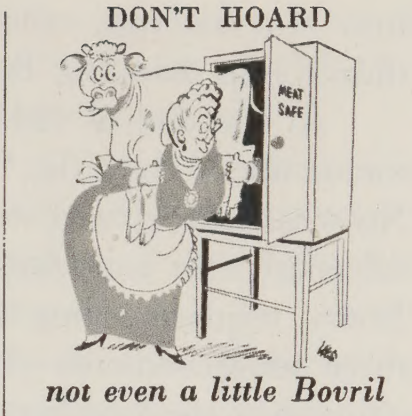
WEATHER FORECAST

"A rainbow at night
is the sailor's delight
A bow in the morning's
the sailors' warning"

FOR LANDLUBBERS: Conditions under which a rainbow can be seen in our latitudes in the evening are: humidity-laden rain area to eastward thus probably departing, while to westward, from where our weather normally comes, the sky is clearing. Conversely, a morning rainbow implies rain area in the west—probably approaching.

Weather the weather with BOVRIL

Possibly he was so christened in a time of depression to prevent that sinking feeling."



Although the single purpose of Bovril advertising has been to advertise Bovril, its effects in time of war have gone far beyond anything we could have hoped. There is evidence that it has helped to 'prevent that sinking feeling' in the morale of the people here in England, and in the most unpredictable ways it has advertised the British spirit to the world.

For example, during the grim days of the London "blitz," Bovril advertisements were reproduced in the American press to illustrate the temper of British people under aerial bombardment; and they probably played some small part in influencing our American friends to support the "Aid for Britain" campaign.

Some Bovril advertisement illustrations seemed to express so happily the mood of the people that we had many requests both from members of H.M. Forces and civilians for copies for framing. Particularly popular was the picture of the members of a Bomb Disposal Squad nonchalantly deciding that there was "*Just time for a hot Bovril*" before they continued on their journey with the huge unexploded bomb their lorry was carrying.

Apart from its infectious cheerfulness and the timely notes of encouragement we have always tried to strike in it, Bovril advertising, has on occasion, been directly turned to good use in the national interest.

At one time we urged the public to put every penny

into War Savings, even if it meant giving up Bovril. They didn't stop drinking Bovril—but they did save.

At the end of 1941 we published a series of advertisements under the title, " Weather the weather with Bovril." No weather forecasts were issued at the time, so under each advertisement we printed humorous verses of weather lore. Many requests came from R.A.F. Stations for copies of these advertisements—because our rhymes were proving invaluable to the members of their Meteorological Departments.

Another series of advertisements, entitled " Astronomy for Firewatchers," appeared in 1942, illustrated with diagrams of star constellations. Shortly after the series began the Air Ministry noticed it and invited us to base our pictures on their official charts. They thought the educational value of the advertisements was important—especially to youngsters of the A.T.C. We therefore accepted the Air Ministry's offer of co-operation and devised a new series of advertisements entitled " Star Location " from the constellation charts the Ministry provided.

HOW BOVRIL SERVED

EARLY IN 1940 there appeared in the public Press a letter written by a young naval officer to his mother. In the course of it he said, " Life in a destroyer is anything but comfortable in stormy weather. We are soaked to the skin with spray, in spite of the ' Dodger ' (canvas screen) which we have fixed to the bridge. So far, none of us has gone down with pneumonia—this must be thanks to the ' Dodger ' and the drinks of hot Bovril served round every evening."

One of the dramatic high-lights of Mr. Noel Coward's brilliant naval film, " In Which We Serve," is the evacuation of Dunkirk. It contains the following episode.

In the half light of dawn a little crowd of exhausted soldiers is gathered on the bridge of the destroyer that has rescued them. A hot drink is being handed round.

" Why did we never think of this for ' elevenses ' in the mess ? " asks the Colonel, " It's damned good ! " The captain of the destroyer explains, " It's only hot Bovril rather heavily laced with sherry."

The role of Bovril in time of war is well epitomised in that shot from a great film. In the firing lines and at the bases, at sea and in the air, in hospitals, factories and civil defence posts, in air-raid shelters, communal kitchens and in the homes of the people everywhere, a cup of Bovril was for countless millions of hard-pressed men and women a never-failing source of good cheer : the first thing they turned to when the vicissitudes of war took toll of their energies and made demands on their fortitude. No higher tribute could be paid to its goodness.

The extract of dialogue and this picture from the film " In Which We Serve," are included by kind permission of Mr. Noel Coward and Two Cities Films Ltd.

FOR HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES

•

MISS GLADYS STOREY'S BOVRIL FUND

(Registered under the War Charities Act, 1940)

•

GRACIOUSLY SUPPORTED BY

HIS MAJESTY THE KING

THE WAR OFFICE MAKES GRANTS TO THE FUND

•

During the Great War of 1914–1918, Miss Gladys Storey rendered incalculable service by inaugurating a Fund for the supply of Bovril to the men of our armies in Flanders. Shortly after the declaration of war in 1939 Miss Storey began to organise her Bovril fund again. Her effort was graciously supported by His Majesty the King, grants were made to it by the War Office, and the public subscribed generously.

Great quantities of Bovril were supplied by Miss Storey's organisation to men in every theatre of war, and are still being sent to the occupying troops in Germany and elsewhere.

Many Generals have written expressing their appreciation of the service Miss Storey has rendered to their men.

A few days after our armies had crossed the Rhine last year, Field-Marshal Montgomery expressed his personal appreciation of Miss Storey's efforts in the letter reproduced, by special permission, on the opposite page.

Tac HEADQUARTERS:
21 ARMY GROUP.

26-3-45

Dear Miss Storey

Thank you for your letter of 23 March. I am sure you will be glad to know that the assaulting troops that crossed the Rhine in the moonlight on Friday night, 23rd March, all had a drink of Bovril before starting.

Mr Churchill much enjoyed a cup of it when touring the area on 24 March.

Yrs. sincerely,
B. L. Montgomery
Field-Marshal

Donations to Miss Gladys Storey's Fund are still welcomed, and should be sent to Miss Gladys Storey,, O.B.E., 10, Wellington Road, London, N.W.8

Old Street suffered Great Damage

BOVRIL IN OCCUPIED TERRITORY

Shortly after the liberation of the Channel Islands, Bovril Ltd., received many letters testifying to the value of Bovril in emergencies during the period of enemy occupation. For example, in November, 1945, Mrs. Theodora Jones, of Jersey, wrote :—

> "I ask you most earnestly to send some Bovril for a case of *real need.* We have been free since May, but I have not yet bought one grain of Bovril. I am in charge of an aged invalid, five miles from the town, and I suppose that if an allocation does come in it is at once snapped up. Please send a 16-oz. bottle."

Bovril Ltd. were unable to accept the cheque enclosed

with Mrs. Jones' letter, as the regulations then in force prohibited direct trading. But it was permissible to send gifts to the Channel Islands. A 16-oz. bottle of Bovril was therefore posted with a letter expressing good will and sympathy. It brought the following reply from Mrs. Jones :

" Thanks a thousand for your kind and prompt action. The parcel arrived today—the greatest thrill since 1940. I assure you there is no item of food or drink I would rather have in my store-cupboard now than Bovril, and I have always felt like that. The week the Huns came, in '40, I put one dozen 2-oz. jars in my cupboard and gradually gave each one to sick folk, the last one on October 20, 1944. I am sorry you returned my cheque, but as your gift is miles beyond price, I do thank you just the same, and send you my sincerest wishes for the peace years to come."

Another revealing letter reached Bovril Ltd. from Mr. John Harris, of Havre des Pas, Jersey. In May, 1945, he wrote :

" During the occupation of Jersey by the Germans I was lucky enough to have some Bovril in my possession, and words cannot describe our gratitude. I may say that in the whole period until the liberation your Bovril kept in perfect condition, and many a time it acted as a great tonic and stimulant to us. Words cannot praise its merits sufficiently."

HOT BOVRIL CHEERS!

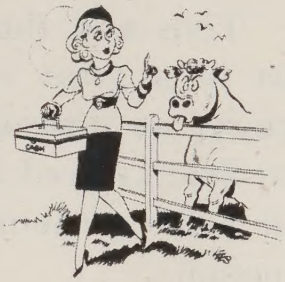
A welcome sight after a London Night Raid

A PRISONER OF THE JAPS

One of the most interesting stories of Bovril in war was given in a letter from Mr. Frank D. Jackson, who was captured by the Japanese at Singapore and thrown with many others into a prison camp near the harbour. After an American incendiary raid on the docks in February, 1945, the prisoners working among the gutted buildings discovered in a partly burned warehouse, or " Godown,"

hundreds of 2-oz. tins of Bovril marked : " To be consumed 1942." " Unfortunately, we were working at some distance from this warehouse," writes Mr. Jackson, " and were well watched by Japanese guards. Claiming a visit to the toilet was necessary, we slid out singly along the water-front and gained access to this Bovril by slipping an arm through an aperture in the corrugated sheeting. The main difficulty then was concealing the tins while being searched by the 'Kompay,' the Japanese secret police. We eventually succeeded by hiding them between the legs in a specially improvised loin cloth. At first, we took so much of this Bovril to sicken of it, but in time we learnt to regulate its use. I have no doubt that many men who were in an

Put every penny you can into Savings



Even if it means going without a little Bovril

" *The Stuff to give the Troops* "

acute state of mal-nutrition and vitaminosis were rallied by this three-year-old Bovril."

Thus and thus in a hundred ways Bovril played its part in a great crisis of war. Now, with gratitude for victory, we turn again to the activities of peace, believing that Bovril served the nation well when its need was greatest and will contribute to its strength for the task of reconstruction.

Cheers!

Printed in Great Britain by S. H. Benson Ltd., Kingsway Hall, London, W.C.2 for Bovril Ltd., Old Street, London, E.C.1.